

February 26, 2019

Mr. Gerard Benzing
All Saints Sisters of the Poor of Baltimore City
1501 Hilton Avenue
Catonsville, MD 21225

Re: All Saints Sisters of the Poor of Baltimore City – Caretaker’s Residence
Forest Conservation Variance
Tracking #01-19-2930

Dear Mr. Benzing:

A request for a variance from the Baltimore County Code Article 33 Environmental Protection and Sustainability, Title 6 Forest Conservation was received by this Department on February 13, 2019. This request proposes to base the afforestation required by Section 33-6-111 of the Forest Conservation Law on the 0.3-acre limit of disturbance (LOD) rather than the entire 80-acre property in order to construct a new residence for the property’s caretaker at an existing convent facility. A specimen tree exists in close proximity to the existing house to be razed but will not be impacted. Although approximately 50 acres of forest exist on the entire convent property, no forest exists within the LOD.

The Director of the Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability (EPS) may grant a special variance to the Forest Conservation Law in accordance with criteria outlined in Section 33-6-116(d)(1) of the Code. There are six (6) criteria listed in Subsection 33-6-116(d) and (e) that shall be used to evaluate the variance request. One (1) of the criteria under Subsection 33-6-116(d) must be met, and all three (3) of the criteria under Subsection 33-6-116(e) must be met, in order to approve the variance.

The first criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(d)(1) of the Code) requires the petitioner to show the land in question cannot yield a reasonable return if the requirement from which the special variance is requested is imposed and will deprive the petitioner of all beneficial use of his property. The property has been functioning as a convent and church since 1917. As such, the petitioner is already realizing significant use of the property without the proposed development for which the variance is being sought. Consequently, full application of the law to the entire property would not deprive the applicant of all beneficial use of the property. It would only affect the cost of complying with this law. Therefore, we find that this criterion has not been met.

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The second criterion (Subsection 33-6-116 (d) (2) of the Code) requires that the petitioner show that his/her plight is due to unique circumstances and not the general conditions of the neighborhood. The petitioner's plight is due to unique budgetary circumstances, not the general conditions of the neighborhood. Consequently, we find that the second criterion has been met.

The third criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(d) (3) of the Code) requires that the petitioner show that the special variance requested will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood. The convent property is surrounded by Patapsco State Park, and the surrounding neighborhood is almost entirely forested. Given that this property's long-time use as convent will not change as a result of this project and that no forest is to be cleared, we find that constructing a new caretaker's residence will not alter the essential character of this neighborhood. Therefore, this criterion has been met.

The fourth criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(e) (1) of the Code) requires that the granting of the special variance will not adversely affect water quality. The project will not impact any streams, wetlands, floodplains, or associated buffers, nor will it impact forest. As such, this Department finds that the proposed variance will not adversely affect water quality and that this criterion has been met.

The fifth criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(e) (2) of the Code) requires that the special variance request does not arise from a condition or circumstance that is the result of actions taken by the petitioner. The petitioner has not taken any prior actions creating a condition or circumstance to necessitate this variance request. Therefore, this criterion has been met.

The sixth criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(e)(3) of the Code) requires that the Director of EPS find that the special variance, as granted, would be consistent with the spirit and intent of Article 33 of the Baltimore County Code. Reducing the afforestation obligation based on the LOD for the construction of the new caretaker's residence would be consistent with the spirit and intent of the Forest Conservation Law. This is especially true given the small size of the LOD in comparison with the entire property and that neither forest nor specimen trees will be impacted. Therefore, this criterion has been met.

Based on our review, this Department finds that all required variance criteria have been met. Therefore, the requested variance is hereby approved in accordance with Section 33-6-116 of the Baltimore County Code contingent upon the following conditions:

1. The LOD shall be limited to the 0.3 acre area shown on the plans accompanying the variance application.

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2. The following note must be included on a revised site plan for this project and all other future plans and plats:

“A variance was granted on February 26, 2019 by Baltimore County Dept. of Environmental Protection & Sustainability to allow afforestation requirements to be based on the 0.3-acre limit of disturbance for the construction of the new caretaker’s residence rather than the entire 80-acre property. Conditions were placed on this variance to ensure that the spirit and intent of the Forest Conservation Law were met in constructing the new residence.”

3. The revised plan to accompany the building permit application must detail proposed tree protection devices to reduce impact to the specimen tree within the LOD.
4. Due to the small LOD and lack of forest clearing, no afforestation or other mitigation is required.
5. Granting this variance does not exempt future development activities on this property from full compliance with the Forest Conservation Law.

It is the intent of this Department to approve this variance. Any changes to site layout may require submittal of revised plans and a new variance request.

Please have the party responsible for meeting the conditions of this variance sign the statement on the following page and return a signed copy of this letter to this Department within 21 calendar days. Failure to return a signed copy may render this approval null and void, or may result in delays in the processing of plans for this project.

If you have any questions regarding this correspondence, please call Ms. Libby Errickson at (410) 887-3980.

Sincerely yours,

David V. Lykens
Acting Director

DVL/lbe

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I/we agree to the above conditions to bring my/our property into compliance with
Baltimore County's Forest Conservation Law.

Owner's Signature

Date

Printed Name